



Emotional challenges in the retail industry: Uncovering the role of emotional exhaustion in shop attendants' performance

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Received Date: May 6, 2024

Revised Date: July 30, 2024

Accepted Date: July 31, 2024

ABSTRACT

Background: Within the scope of the organization, performance is an important topic to be researched because of the facts that are crucial for the future and sustainability of the organization. To salesperson task performance are considered the most important and influential aspect in assessing their performance. In addition, emotional labor is known to be a display rule that is often found in front-line workers such as salesperson. So this study seeks to examine the relationship between emotional labor and task performance, through the mediating role of emotional exhaustion. **Method:** This study collected data from 58 participants who work as salesperson in the retail industry. The three instruments used in this study were the Emotional Labor Scale (ELS), the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and the Individual Work Performance Scale (IWPS). **Result:** The results showed that emotional exhaustion did not mediate the relationship between emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting) and task performance. **Conclusion:** However, the use of surface acting strategy is able to make retail salesperson experience higher exhaustion due to significant and positive relations. **Novelty/Originality in this article:** This study offers a new perspective in understanding the complex dynamics between emotional labor, emotional exhaustion, and task performance among retail salespeople. This study provides important insights into how psychological factors may influence job effectiveness in an industry that relies heavily on customer interactions.

KEYWORDS: deep acting; emotional exhaustion; retail salesperson; surface acting; task performance.

1. Introduction

The growth of the retail industry, particularly in urban areas, has been marked by a decline in mall tenant vacancy rates in Jakarta, from 12.1% in 2018 to 10.4% in 2019, while occupancy rates in the Greater Jakarta area (Bodetabek) increased to 81.4% (Detik.com, 2020; Kompas.com, 2020). This rapid growth elevated Indonesia's retail ranking by three positions, placing it among the top five in the Global Retail Development Index 2019, out of 200 developing countries (Kompas.com, 2020). Considering this growth trajectory, retail sales associates are regarded as one of the key factors driving the success of the retail industry. Sales associates are often seen as the company's representatives by customers, as they are the frontline employees who directly interact with customers and personally convey the value of the company's products (Schwepker & Ingram, 2016). As frontliners,

Cite This Article:

Maulidiyah, L. A., & Parahyanti, E. (2024). Emotional challenges in the retail industry: Uncovering the role of emotional exhaustion in shop attendants' performance. *Asian Journal Collaboration of Social Environmental and Education*, 2(1), 17-29. <https://doi.org/10.61511/ajcsee.v2i1.2024.793>

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sales associates are considered to have the most comprehensive understanding of customer needs and wants, recognizing that customer satisfaction plays a critical role in the company's business strategy (Gomez et al., 2004). Therefore, this study focuses on sales associates in the retail industry.

A retail sales associate works in a store to sell products (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). According to Onetonline.org (n.d.), a retail sales associate is an individual responsible for selling specific products such as furniture, beauty products, motor vehicles, appliances, electronics, or clothing to consumers. The primary characteristic of a retail sales associate is their direct engagement with customers during the sales process. Given their critical role as a direct link between the company and its customers, the performance of retail sales associates deserves close attention. The performance of a sales associate influences customer experience and their evaluation of the company, with positive interactions providing opportunities to enhance customer loyalty (Bove & Johnson, 2001; Lynch & Chernatony, 2007).

Performance comprises several dimensions, with one of the most commonly observed being in-role or task performance. Examples of task performance for retail sales associates include product knowledge, successful customer transactions, as well as time management and organizational skills (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). For retail sales associates, contributing to the company by achieving desired sales targets, generating profits, and satisfying customers are crucial in evaluating their performance (Baldauf & Cravens, 2002). Therefore, task performance is considered particularly significant, as it directly relates to the core responsibilities of retail sales associates, with assessments often emphasizing the quantity of product sales.

To operate effectively and achieve high performance, companies or organizations often implement specific rules as part of their business and marketing strategies. Frontline employees, such as retail sales associates, are required to present themselves in accordance with the company's established display rules. This concept is referred to as emotional labour, defined as the process of regulating both feelings and expressions for organizational purposes (Grandey, 2000). According to Grandey (2000), there are two strategies of emotional labour: deep acting and surface acting. When interacting with customers and adopting deep acting, a retail sales associate modifies their inner emotions to align with positive feelings, even if they were initially experiencing negative emotions. This strategy helps create a genuine positive outward expression. On the other hand, surface acting involves altering only outward expressions without changing the underlying emotions. This often leads to emotional dissonance, a state where there is a discrepancy between felt emotions and expressed emotions.

Emotional labour requires retail sales associates to regulate or modify their emotions in accordance with the expectations of both customers and the organization. While dealing with difficult customers, receiving degrading treatment, or experiencing other negative situations, retail sales associates are still expected to maintain a smiling demeanour. Emotions, however, play a crucial role in the job. The emotions experienced by employees within an organization affect their psychological and physical health, attitudes toward tasks, the organization, and job-related achievements (Moon & Hur, 2011). In recent decades, researchers have increasingly focused on studies related to emotions in the workplace (Ashkanasy, 2004), with some of these studies addressing the assumption that emotional processes impact employee performance.

Meanwhile, the results of a meta-analysis study by Hülshager and Schewe (2011) show a negative relationship between surface acting and task performance. However, the correlation is small, while deep acting has no significant relationship with task performance. Another study by Grandey and Gabriel (2005) found a significant but weak relationship between deep acting and task performance. These findings suggest the possibility of other variables that may mediate the relationship between emotional labour and task performance. The researchers identified emotional exhaustion as a potential mediator in this study.

Emotional exhaustion is characterized by a sense of depletion in an individual's emotional "reserves" and a lack of energy. This condition arises in highly demanding and people-oriented situations, such as those commonly experienced by retail sales associates (Babakus et al., 1999). Previous studies have found that surface acting has a significant positive relationship with emotional exhaustion, whereas deep acting demonstrates a significant negative relationship (Celiker et al., 2019; Lin & Chang, 2015). Furthermore, emotional exhaustion has a significant direct negative impact on performance (Lin & Chang, 2015). It has been stated that emotional exhaustion affects an individual's physiological and psychological health, as well as job performance (Moon & Hur, 2011). This psychological and physiological state is caused by feelings of frustration, tension, and the inability to cope with the workload entrusted to the individual (Lin & Chang, 2015).

1.1 Task performance

Borman and Motowidlo (1993) referred to it as task performance. Task performance is defined by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) as the effectiveness of employees in carrying out activities that contribute to the technical smoothness of the organization. Task performance relates to the technical aspects of work, whether in executing existing technical processes (directly) or maintaining technical processes to run smoothly (indirectly). Task performance is observed directly by executing the technical processes of the organization/company, such as in the case of retail shop attendants who are tasked with meeting sales targets, or indirectly by serving and maintaining technical requirements, such as in the case of managers who are responsible for planning, managing, and supervising. Task performance for retail shop attendants may include product knowledge, sales targets, and time and organizational management.

Supported by previous studies, several factors that can influence task performance include emotional exhaustion and emotional labor. Wright and Bonett (1997) found a significant and negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and task performance, which leads to an unhealthy work environment and employee dissatisfaction. Viewed through the conservation of resources (COR) theory, individuals experiencing emotional exhaustion become selective and sensitive due to their depleted energy. They are inclined not to expend their limited energy for organizations they perceive as responsible for their exhaustion. Consequently, they tend to withhold efforts to achieve high performance (Tourigny et al., 2013).

The resource depletion theory predicts that display rules can drain resources, thereby impacting task-related performance. A study by Bursalı et al. (2014) found that emotional labour, specifically surface acting, significantly and negatively predicts task performance. When employees engage in surface acting, they must continuously monitor their actual emotions and repeatedly modify their emotional expressions. This effort depletes limited mental resources, leaving insufficient capacity for executing job-related tasks that require executive functioning (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007).

1.2 Emotional labor

Grandey (2000) refers to emotional labor as the process of managing both feelings and expressions for organizational purposes. There are two dimensions in emotional labor, namely deep acting and surface acting. The deep acting strategy involves attempting to genuinely experience or feel the emotions to be displayed, where feelings are actively induced, suppressed, or shaped until they can be displayed (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Employees engaging in deep acting try to put themselves in the position of others and produce displays that appear authentic to customers (Diefendorff et al., 2005). On the other hand, an employee is said to engage in "surface acting" if they only attempt to change their outward appearance and behavior when displaying required emotions (Hochschild, 1983). Surface acting is an emotional labor strategy involving compliance with organizational display rules by managing and simulating emotional expressions that are not actually felt

by the worker, including hiding felt emotions or those deemed inappropriate to display. Therefore, this strategy pertains to modifying expressions, not internal feelings or emotions as in deep acting.

Grandey (2000) stated that emotional labor is known to have negative impacts on both individuals and organizations. One of these impacts can lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2000). Burnout and emotional exhaustion are commonly found in service-based jobs and typically occur when employees become overly emotionally involved in interacting with customers and have few ways to replenish the emotional resources they expend (Jackson et al., 1986). When situations require employees to regulate repeated emotional responses, they experience depletion of energy and emotional exhaustion (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Research indicates that surface acting is more likely to lead to emotional exhaustion due to the effort required to fake or suppress negative emotions (Jeung et al., 2018). Modifying internal states or engaging in deep acting still requires effort and attention (Grandey, 2000). Therefore, other empirical studies show that both surface acting and deep acting are positively related to emotional exhaustion, with surface acting generally showing a stronger relationship (Martínez-Iñigo et al., 2007; Hochschild, 1983).

1.3 Emotional exhaustion

Maslach and Jackson (1981) defined burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that often occurs among individuals whose work involves interactions with many people. Maslach and Jackson (1984) observed that burnout is not only a state of physical fatigue but also psychological exhaustion. Burnout consists of dimensions known as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Among these dimensions, emotional exhaustion is considered the main and central component of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion is also the clearest manifestation of burnout, where people often refer to experiences of exhaustion when describing burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

Maslach and Jackson (1984) stated that emotional exhaustion is the excessive emotional demand on individuals during interpersonal interactions, which cannot be managed by individuals, leading to depletion of emotional resources. Studies by Maslach and Jackson (1981) were based on work in the service industry or service sector, where employees are often required to spend a lot of time engaging intensively with others. Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) found a strong relationship between emotional labor and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, Wright and Cropanzano (1998) found that emotional exhaustion can predict an individual's job performance. Similarly, Taris's study (2006) showed that compared to other components of burnout, emotional exhaustion is able to decrease performance and prevent employees from completing their core tasks.

1.4 Relationship dynamics

It is said that emotional labor involving the regulation of emotions and behavior can deplete individuals' limited resources and affect task-related performance (Bursalı et al., 2014). However, meta-analytical studies by Hülsheger and Schewe (2011) did not find a strong enough relationship between surface acting and task performance, nor did they find a relationship between deep acting and task performance. Other studies found a positive but weak relationship between deep acting and task performance (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). The results of these studies discuss the possibility of other variables that could mediate the relationship. Upon re-examining the explanation of the relationship between emotional labor and task performance, it appears that there is one important variable that has been overlooked and may bridge the relationship between them. Researchers assume this variable is emotional exhaustion, considering that depleted states are synonymous with emotional exhaustion.

This assumption is supported by previous studies that have shown a relationship between emotional labour and emotional exhaustion. Surface acting leads to emotional dissonance, which is the mismatch between emotions that are genuinely felt and those displayed (Lee & Ok, 2014). Repeated experiences of emotional dissonance can foster feelings of inauthenticity and drain emotional resources, ultimately causing individuals to experience emotional exhaustion. One way to minimize emotional dissonance is by increasing the use of deep-acting strategies. In contrast to surface acting, deep acting, which generates positive emotions, is described as a resource acquisition process, thereby reducing emotional exhaustion.

Previous studies have also revealed that emotional exhaustion has a negative effect on task performance. Individuals with high emotional exhaustion struggle to manage their dwindling energy and emotional resources. This makes them feel incapable of carrying the workload entrusted to them and prevents them from performing their job tasks well (Lin & Chang, 2015). Therefore, individuals experiencing high emotional exhaustion are said to have poorer task performance. Based on the dynamics of the relationships outlined above, the hypotheses of this research are as follows:

H1: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between emotional labor (surface acting) and task performance.

H2: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between emotional labor (deep acting) and task performance.

2. Methods

2.1 Research type and design

This study falls under quantitative research. Numeric data or scores obtained from participants are analyzed statistically to obtain a summary and interpretation of the research findings. This study involves a single data collection without providing any treatment or manipulation to the participants; therefore, the research has a non-experimental cross-sectional design.

2.2 Research participants

The participants in this study were employees working as retail sales associates in stores or department stores located in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (Jabodetabek). Retail sales associates in this study were defined as individuals who directly interact with customers as part of their daily work. Additional participant criteria included working full-time as a retail sales associate for a minimum of three months with direct customer interaction. This criterion was based on previous research findings indicating that emotional exhaustion can emerge after three months of engagement in emotional labor (Fischer, 2019).

In the data collection process, this study recruited participants using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience or accidental sampling. This method was chosen based on the suitability of the sample with the research participant criteria, ease of access, and the willingness of participants to engage in the study (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). A total of 90 participants were initially recruited; however, only 58 participants met the criteria and were included in further analysis. The exclusion of participants was due to their failure to meet the research characteristics. Specifically, 29 participants were eliminated because they were working from home, which was considered to reduce the accuracy of the study as they were not directly interacting with customers in their daily work. Additionally, three other participants were excluded due to having less than three months of work experience.

2.3 Research instrument

The Individual Work Performance Scale (IWPS) developed by Koopmans (2014) was utilized to measure task performance in this study. The task performance dimension in the IWPS instrument consists of 5 items with a 6-point Likert scale response format, ranging from point 1 (never) to point 6 (always). The IWPS used in this study has been adapted into the Indonesian language by the researcher, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.82 and valid items ranging between 0.48-0.77.

Emotional labor was measured using the Emotional Labor Scale (ELS) developed by Dieffendorf, Gosserand, & Croyle (2005). The surface acting dimension in the ELS consists of seven items, and the deep acting dimension comprises four items. The ELS used in this study has been adapted into Indonesian. This instrument has a response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Reliability results indicate that the ELS instrument has good internal consistency, namely 0.76 for the deep acting dimension and 0.89 for the surface acting dimension. Additionally, the ELS obtained CrIT values ranging between 0.32-0.78.

In this research, the Indonesian version adaptation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Maslach & Jackson (1981) (as cited in Yulhaida, 2018) was used to measure emotional exhaustion. The emotional exhaustion dimension in the MBI instrument consists of 9 items with a 7-point Likert scale response format ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). The MBI obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.87 and was valid within the CrIT range of 0.43-0.74.

2.4 Research procedure

The first step in the research procedure was conducting a literature review related to the variables to be studied to gain a deeper understanding of the research model. After determining the model, the researcher then composed an introduction containing the urgency, objectives, and benefits of the research. Subsequently, the study conducted a literature review on the variables under investigation, namely emotional labor, task performance, and emotional exhaustion, including the dynamics of the relationships among these three variables. While delving into the understanding of the variables, the researcher searched for suitable measurement instruments. The measurement instruments were then adapted through the process of translation and expert judgment. Once completed, the utilized measurement instruments were combined into an online questionnaire along with informed consent. Subsequently, a test of the measurement instruments was conducted prior to data collection for the research.

The next step is to recruit participants. The researcher first created posters and broadcast messages containing participant characteristics, research rewards, and the online questionnaire link. These posters and broadcast messages were then disseminated on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Line, Twitter, and Instagram. The researcher also sought assistance from friends, family, and acquaintances, as well as career influencer and retail community groups on Instagram, to help spread the research questionnaire. Subsequently, rewards were randomly drawn, with each of the five selected participants receiving a Gopay reward worth Rp. 250,000.

The final stage involves data processing conducted quantitatively through statistical analysis using the IBM SPSS Statistics 24 program. The researcher employs descriptive statistical analysis techniques to gain an overview of the participants' demographic data and to understand the general overview of each research variable. Pearson correlation is utilized to examine the correlation between research variables. Additionally, the PROCESS version 3.5 model 4 by Hayes (2022) is employed to test the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion in the relationship between emotional labor and task performance.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 General participant characteristics

Based on descriptive analysis, the participants in this study ranged in age from 18 to 54 years, with an average age of 32 years. The majority of participants fell into the 18-29 age group (46.6%). The study was predominantly attended by female participants, totaling 41 individuals (70.7%). Most participants worked as retail shop attendants in Jakarta (60.3%). The study was primarily attended by participants with a high school diploma or equivalent education (65.5%). Lastly, the majority of participants had been working as retail shop attendants for 1 to 5 years (39.7%).

3.2 General description of research variables

Table 1. Descriptive statistics table for research variables (N=58)

	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	α
Surface Acting	3,35	3,57	1,45	1	6	0,89
Deep Acting	3,96	4,25	1,3	1	6	0,76
Emotional Exhaustion	1,91	1,66	1,33	0	5,78	0,87
Task Performance	5,2	5,2	0,76	2,2	6	0,82

The average scores on the surface acting and deep acting scales were 3.35 (SD = 1.45) and 3.95 (SD = 1.30) respectively, indicating that the majority of participants responded "somewhat agree," suggesting a relatively high usage of surface acting and deep acting strategies among participants. On the emotional exhaustion scale, the minimum score observed was 0, indicating that some participants did not experience emotional exhaustion in their roles as retail shop attendants. Meanwhile, the emotional exhaustion scale obtained an average score of 1.91 (SD = 1.33). It is evident that participants predominantly responded "once a month," indicating a relatively low level of emotional exhaustion among participants. The task performance scale received an average score of 5.20 (SD = 0.76), indicating that participants exhibited high task performance. The results of the reliability test indicate that all measurement instruments in the study have good internal consistency, with values above 0.7 (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009).

3.3 Correlation results of emotional work, emotional exhaustion and task performance

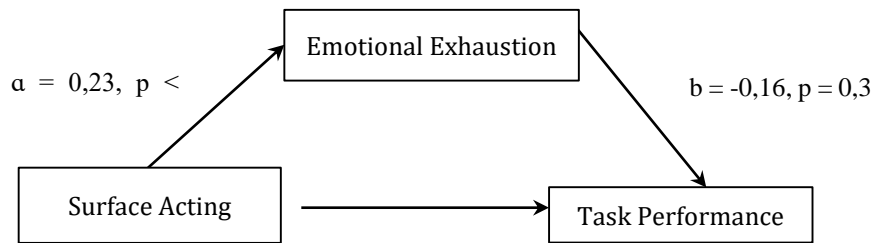
Table 2. Correlation test results for surface acting, deep acting, emotional exhaustion, and task performance

	Mean	1	2	3	4
1 Surface Acting					
2 Deep Acting		-0,025			
3 Emotional Exhaustion		0,265*	0,121		
4 Task Performance		-0,016	0,089	-0,131	

*significant at $p < 0.05$

The results of Pearson correlation analysis indicate that only the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion was found to be significant and positive ($r = 0.265$, $p = 0.02$). This indicates that the higher the use of surface acting strategies, the higher the level of emotional exhaustion experienced by retail shop attendants.

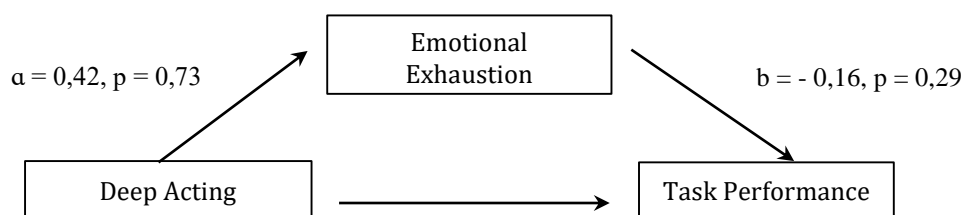
3.4 Mediation test analysis



Direct effect, $c'_{cs} = 0,02$, 95% CI [-0,09, 0,11]
 Indirect effect, $ab_{cs} = -0,03$, 95% CI [0,04, -0,12]
 Total effect, $c_{cs} = -0,01$, 95% CI [-0,10, 0,09]

Fig. 1. Model I mediation test results

Mediation analysis was conducted using the simple mediation model 4 from the PROCESS Macro Hayes (2022). Both mediation models were analyzed with a 95% confidence interval and a bootstrap sample of 5000. The variable gender (jk) was found to be correlated with emotional exhaustion and thus included as a covariate with jk $a = -0.44$, $SE = 3.03$, $p < 0.05$. Furthermore, the analysis conducted on model 1 yielded several findings. First, no direct effect was found between surface acting and task performance with $c'_{cs} = 0.02$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.09, 0.11]. This indicates that surface acting is not directly related to task performance and suggests the presence of other variables that may mediate the relationship between the two variables. Second, the researchers also found no indirect effect between surface acting and task performance with $ab = -0.03$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.12]. This finding indicates that emotional exhaustion does not mediate the relationship between surface acting and task performance. Third, a non-significant relationship was found in the total effect between surface acting and task performance, $c_{cs} = -0.01$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.10, 0.09]. Fourth, surface acting and emotional exhaustion were significantly related, $a = 0.23$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$. Fifth, the researchers found no significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and task performance with $b = -0.16$, $SE = 0.05$, $p > 0.05$. Sixth, the results of the mediation analysis yielded an r^2 of 0.26, indicating that 26% of the variance in emotional exhaustion can be explained by surface acting. The researchers also obtained another r^2 of 0.02, indicating that 2% of the variance in task performance can be explained by emotional exhaustion and surface acting. Based on the findings presented, it can be concluded that emotional exhaustion does not mediate the relationship between surface acting and task performance, thus rejecting the alternative hypothesis 1 of the study.



Direct effect, $c'_{cs} = 0,10$, 95% CI [-0,12, 0,27]
 Indirect effect, $ab_{cs} = -0,01$, 95% CI [-0,06, 0,05]
 Total effect, $c_{cs} = 0,95$, 95% CI [-0,13, 0,26]

Fig. 2. Model II mediation test results

Covariate variables were included, namely gender (G), which was found to correlate with emotional exhaustion, with $G a = -0.45$, $SE = 3.18$, $p < 0.05$. Subsequently, the researcher conducted a mediation test on model II and obtained several findings. First, there was no direct effect found between deep acting and task performance, with $c'_{cs} = 0.10$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI [-0.12, 0.27]. These results indicate that other variables may mediate the relationship between deep acting and task performance. Second, the researcher also did not find an indirect effect between deep acting and task performance because $ab = -0.01$, $SE = 0.28$, 95% CI [-0.06, 0.05], indicating that emotional exhaustion does not mediate the relationship between deep acting and task performance. Third, the results of the total effect between deep acting and task performance also did not show a significant relationship, namely with $c_{cs} = 0.95$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [-0.13, 0.26]. Fourth, a non-significant relationship was found between deep acting and emotional exhaustion, $a = 0.42$, $SE = 0.28$, $p = 0.73$. Fifth, there was also no significant relationship found between emotional exhaustion and task performance, with $b = -0.16$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.29$. Finally, the mediation test results obtained $r^2 = 0.21$, which can be interpreted as 21% of the variance in emotional exhaustion can be explained through deep acting, and another r^2 of 0.02, indicating that 2% of the variance in task performance can be explained through emotional exhaustion and deep acting. Overall, based on the findings of the mediation test conducted on model II, it can be concluded that emotional exhaustion does not mediate the relationship between deep acting and task performance; therefore, alternative hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Based on the results of the mediation tests, both in model I and II, there was no direct influence found between the independent variables (X), namely surface acting and deep acting, on the dependent variable (Y), which is task performance. This is not an issue for mediation research because, according to Memon, Ramayah, Hwa & Ting (2018), mediation analysis does not require an association or relationship between X and Y. Instead of emphasizing the significance between X and Y, researchers suggest disregarding it and focusing more on the significance of the indirect relationship and the strength of that indirect relationship (Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011).

Meanwhile, the study presents different results from previous research where deep acting adopted by retail salespersons was found to have no effect on emotional exhaustion. Nevertheless, these findings align with research by Grandey (2003) and Martínez-Iñigo et al. (2007). Authentic emotional displays in the deep acting strategy are considered to elicit more positive responses from customers. Additionally, employees also feel more positive with no discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions, thus deep acting can reduce employee emotional dissonance. Unlike surface acting, the deep acting strategy allows employees to replenish their emotional resources. Therefore, for retail salespersons adopting this strategy, they may not experience emotional exhaustion. These findings imply that the use of deep acting strategies can benefit retail salespersons, thus they are expected to train themselves in emotion regulation to effectively adopt deep acting strategies when dealing directly with customers.

4. Conclusions

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of emotional exhaustion as a mediator in the relationship between emotional labor (surface acting, deep acting) and task performance among retail salespersons. Referring to the results of the analysis and interpretation of the data presented earlier, this study concludes that emotional exhaustion does not mediate the relationship between surface acting and task performance. Only the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion was found to be positive and significant. Therefore, neither hypothesis 1 nor hypothesis 2 is accepted.

The researchers acknowledge that this study has several limitations. First, task performance was measured using the Individual Work Performance Scale (IWPS) developed by Koopmans (2014), which is assessed through a self-report method that is inherently subjective. This method increases the likelihood of a ceiling effect, a condition where research participants tend to score near the maximum possible score (Garin, 2014).

In this case, participants are likely to rate their task performance highly due to social desirability bias or the tendency to present themselves in a favourable light. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies employ task performance measures based on assessments from supervisors or managers or collect direct data regarding the achievement of targets from the retail sales associates involved to obtain more accurate data.

Second, the measurement instruments used in this study were originally in English to assess all research variables. However, the translation process was conducted only once, from English to Indonesian, without performing a back-translation from Indonesian to English. This may lead to inaccuracies in the cross-linguistic understanding of the measurement instruments.

Third, the participant criteria lacked specificity regarding job tasks. It is recommended that future research control this aspect, as sales associates may engage with customers but at a low intensity that does not sufficiently involve emotional roles, which could impact emotional exhaustion differently compared to sales associates in convenience stores.

Lastly, this study included a sample of 58 participants. Based on a GPower analysis, this number does not meet the recommended sample size of at least 68 participants. Consequently, the conclusions drawn may need to be more generalizable to the broader population. Future studies are encouraged to increase the sample size, as a larger sample would provide results that more closely reflect the actual relationships within the population.

Acknowledgement

Authors sincerely thank the reviewers for their constructive feedback and the editor for their guidance and support, which have significantly enhanced the quality of this article.

Author Contribution

L.A.M. and E.P. contributed fully to the writing of this article from the beginning to the end of the drafting process.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Ethical Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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